

BROOMALL--Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) met with five students with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and their teacher Ms. Randi Rentz at Worrall Elementary School in Broomall. An estimated 1.77 million American families are affected by autism spectrum disorders (ASD), including Asperger Syndrome (AS). — “According to the Center for Disease Control, autism now strikes 1 in 150 of America’s children, and is more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined,” said Congressman Sestak. “Additionally, autism is growing at a startling rate of 10-17% per year. At this rate, the prevalence of autism could reach 4 million Americans in the next decade. We need greater awareness and support for this important health issue.”

Asperger Syndrome (AS) is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), characterized by a greater or lesser degree of impairment in language and communication skills, as well as repetitive or restrictive patterns of thought and behavior.

Unlike children with autism, children with AS retain their early language skills. Some symptoms of AS include: repetitive routines or rituals, peculiarities in speech and language, socially and emotionally inappropriate behavior and the inability to interact successfully with peers, problems with non-verbal communication, including the restricted use of gestures, limited or inappropriate facial expressions, and uncoordinated motor movement.

Congressman Sestak is a cosponsor of two pieces of legislation, HR 1881 and HR 2609, to help with research and educational services for those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ADS).

H.R., 1881, The Expanding the Promise for Individuals with Autism Act of 2007, aims to convene a national task force to evaluate and report on evidence-based biomedical and behavioral treatments and services. Furthermore, it will establish State-based demonstration grant programs to provide evidence-based autism treatments, interventions, and services for children and adults. It will also provide funding to protection and advocacy systems to address the needs of individuals with autism and other emerging populations of individuals with disabilities, and fund expanded access to coordinated multi-agency treatments, interventions, and services to children.

H.R. 2609, The Empowering Children with Autism through Education Act, would require the Secretary of Education to establish the Empowering Children with Autism through Education Task Force to identify and disseminate evidence-based educational strategies and promising best practices to improve the quality of learning for individuals with autism in grades K-12.